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40 White House reconsidering tax to fund superfund cleanup

*Libby residents support
fee on polluting industries*

By CHRISTOPHER THORNE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration might ask Congress to reimpose a "polluter's tax" to pay for cleaning up highly toxic waste sites, an Environmental Protection Agency official said Wednesday.

"We will look at that again" in the 2004 budget year, which begins in October 2003, said Marianne Horinko, the administrator of the Superfund program.

Horinko told a Senate Environment and Public Works subcommittee that the White House is reconsidering its opposition to the tax, which expired in 1995.

Money raised from the tax went into the Superfund trust fund, created in 1980 as the government's bank account to hold money collected from industries prone to pollution.

The trust fund, which reached a high of \$3.6 billion before Congress refused to reauthorize the tax, is expected to dwindle to \$28 million by 2003.

In communities notorious for their disastrous toxic waste

contamination, residents have been pushing congressional members to reinstate the tax on industries.

Residents of Libby, home of now-defunct W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine blamed for widespread asbestos poisoning, have been among those urging lawmakers to reinstate the tax on industries.

The Citizen's Advisory Group in Libby mailed letters to the entire Montana delegation last month, demanding they support the polluters tax. They won no promises from Sens. Max Baucus, D-Mont., Conrad Burns, R-Mont., or Rep. Dennis Rehberg, R-Mont.

The Libby cleanup is expected to cost more than \$50 million. W.R. Grace & Co., which ran the vermiculite mine, has since declared bankruptcy, clouding any certainty of whether the EPA would ever be able to get the company to pay clean up costs.

Bush opposes imposing the tax on industries as a revenue source in his proposed budget for 2003.